

3039

THE GOOD OLD WAY:

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE OPENING

OF THE

NEW PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

SCARBOROUGH.

On Sabbath, 3rd February, 1850.

By the Rev. James George,

MINISTER OF THE CONGREGATION.

TORONTO:

ANDREW H. ARMOUR AND CO., KING STREET.

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THIS DISCOURSE

Is Dedicated

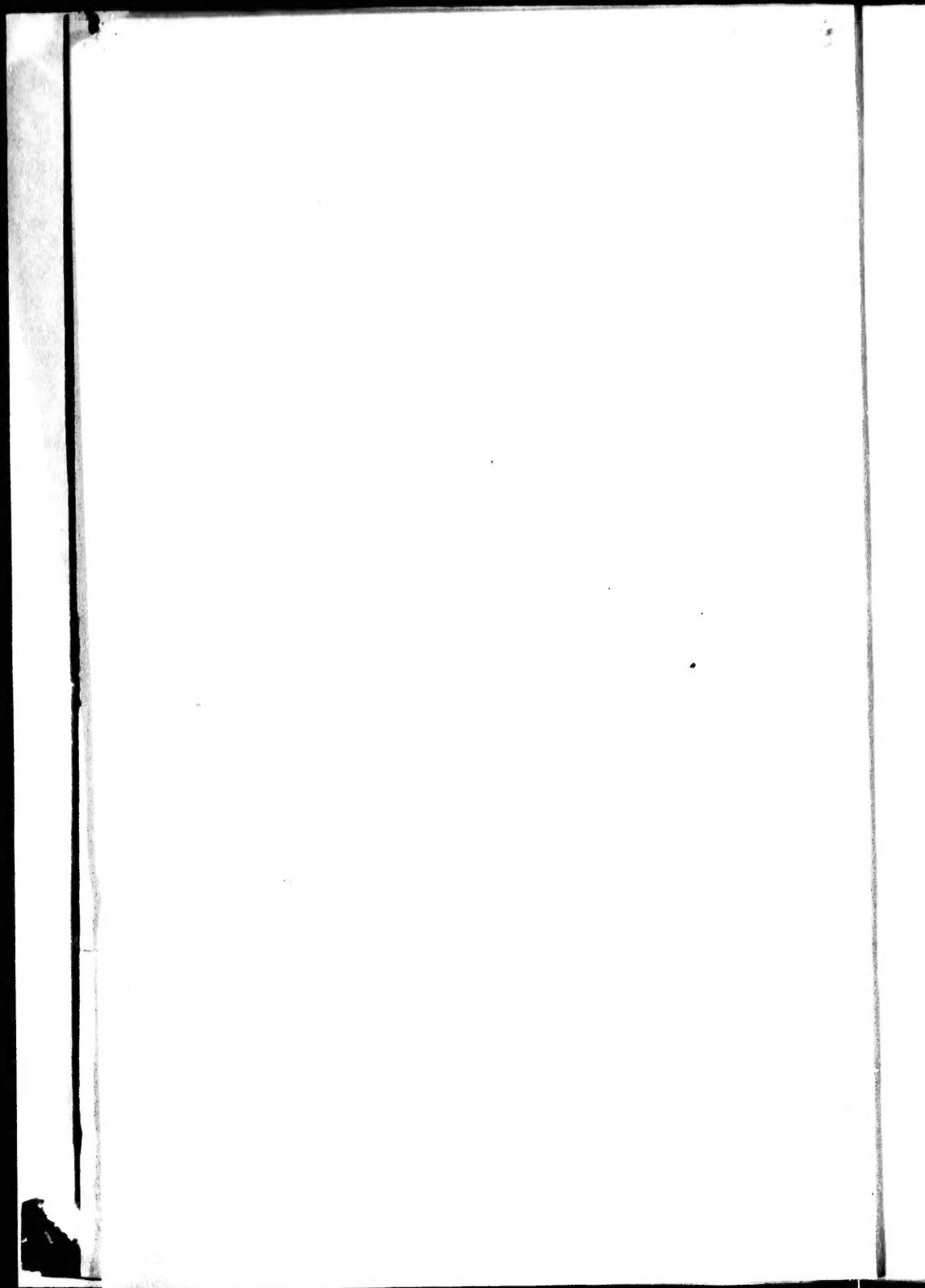
TO THE HEADS OF FAMILIES,

CONNECTED WITH THE CONGREGATION,

AS A TOKEN

OF THE AFFECTIONATE RESPECT OF THEIR

PASTOR.



THE GOOD OLD WAY:

A SERMON.

Thus saith the Lord, Stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.—JEREMIAH vi., ver. 16.

THE truth of God, in revealed religion, is often in Scripture compared to a path. The figure is simple, and pregnant with meaning. Progress to a definite end is one of the deepest laws of our being, and is indeed a law, which seems to prevail in all the departments of the Divine Government. But motion is not progress, unless it be motion in the right direction. The traveller who would reach his destination, must first of all be sure, that he is in the right road. The path of religion is that which leads the soul to God, to piety, virtue, and life everlasting.

In illustrating the passage I have now read, I shall

I. Explain the general and broad principle in the text, viz. :—*that all reformation consists in a faithful return to God's truth*; here called the Old Paths.

At the time the text was uttered, things among the Jewish people were approaching a crisis. God forgotten, idolatry prevalent; impiety and immorality, as might be expected, had deeply and extensively affected the national mind. Sin in any degree is offensive to God. It is that abominable thing which He hates. But when sin reaches a certain point, the Divine forbearance ends, and judgment begins. Yet, God does not smite without warning; nor smite before He has compassionately employed those various instrumentalities, by which the thoughtless may be aroused, and the

erring reclaimed. Hence, the prophet Jeremiah was sent to this rebellious people, with arguments and appeals, well fitted to produce conviction and lead to repentance. The prophet was indeed admirably qualified for his work. And the *object of his mission*, whether he spoke the language of commination, or of mercy, was to induce sinners to flee by repentance and reformation from the impending wrath of Jehovah. He tells the people of their sins,—tells them in what their reformation must begin,—in what it must consist,—and the happy results that would flow from such a reformation as God required. In the name of God, he calls upon them to return from every way that is wrong,—to turn from all those ways that lead to destruction,—to the good old path, that leads to God,—and he promises them if they did so, they would “find rest for their souls.” He calls upon them to take their stand in the old way, and to inquire, honestly and faithfully, if it be not the only path of safety. In a word, they are called upon by the prophet to turn from all that is new and false in their religion and practice, to the old doctrines, worship, and duties, of the old, but Divine religion. And not because it was old, but because it was of God, and eternally true. It was thus, that God, by his servant, addressed the Jewish people. He tells them he had marked out a certain way for them—an old way—truth as old as eternity—duties, obligations and rewards as old as the first hour that God revealed himself to man, as his Creator, Law-giver, and Redeemer. As all their sin and misery arose from their departure from this old system of Divine truth, so their only safety lay in returning to it. And is not this the essence of all true reformation—a thorough return to the faith and practice of what God has of old revealed, but which in reality is ever new, and to man ever of the highest moment?

On the same principle, on which inspired prophets proceeded, did the great Protestant Reformers act; and just so far as they stuck to it, they were true reformers. The

nations of Christendom had departed from the good old path, and were walking in ways not good—were worshipping the creature more than the Creator—were trusting to their own merits for justification, not to the merits of Christ—were punctilious in rites, but forgetful of spiritual and moral obligations. This state of things very much needed reformation—and certain men of God were raised up to accomplish it. They had got light themselves from the lamp of heavenly truth. They brought this forth, held it up, and called to their fellow mortals, bewildered with all sorts of delusions—see the way—the true way that God has marked out for you ; forsake all other ways, walk in this, and it will lead you out of error, sin, and misery, to God, to piety, to life everlasting. Many heard and obeyed, and as many as did so had a blessed reformation.

Since that memorable time, Europe has had many reformers, and has needed them. But it is deeply to be lamented that not a few of those who have assumed that high and difficult vocation, should so often have forgotten a principle, quite indispensable to the success of their work. For I know of no principle that should be more fundamental with reformers than this :—that all reformation, to end well, *must begin in a return to God*. The work of destruction may be carried on very effectually to a certain extent, and this great truth forgotten. Nor is it denied, that in many cases, there can be no reformation till much has been destroyed. Yet destruction is not it, and may never lead to it. The true reformer is not a mere demolitionist, but a wise master-builder. And he who would build wisely here, must never for a moment forget, that a return to God, in the individual heart and conscience of men, is of the last consequence to the accomplishment of his work. Most candid persons will admit, that more than a few of those terrible men, who arose during the French revolution, were possessed of vast intellectual attainments, matchless zeal, and, upon the whole, were enthusiastically

bent on the reformation of society and the happiness of their country. They failed miserably. Alas! poor men, how could it be otherwise. They knew not the old path of God's truth. They had only learned the new way of the infidel philosophy. That could afford them no safe guidance in their difficult task, but could only lead them, as it did, into helpless confusion and frightful ruin. Hence the terrible labours of these men, and the disastrous consequences—when compared with the labours of Luther and Knox, and the results that followed their efforts—furnish a *measure of singular accuracy*, by which we may arrive at the relative value of the two methods, by which it has been attempted to reform men, and improve civil and religious institutions. The one method assumes it as indispensable to all this, that the Divine help be sought, and vouchsafed; and that man shall, first of all, return to that God from whom he has departed;—while the other method, arrogantly affirms, that all the reformation that is necessary may be accomplished without any special aid from God, or any hearty acknowledgment of His government. It is true, that bad men, acting from the worst of motives, might be made indirectly instrumental in preparing the way for great reforms, and so might a pestilence or shipwreck, by cutting off some powerful and tyrannical despot. It must, nevertheless, be borne in mind, that all social or moral reformation, which is to yield permanent benefit to man, must spring from the great principles of Divine truth understood and believed by him. Not the ambitious and the selfish, but the wise and the pious, can either understand these principles, or apply them. The world cannot too soon learn this, *and let the lesson cost what it may*, it must be learned. To dethrone God from among us, and tacitly, if not avowedly, disown his truth; and to give place to Satan, and to expect that *his servants*, mainly influenced by pride, avarice, and selfish expediency, shall bring about reformation, is really to unite the madness of Bedlam to the

impiety of Hell. My brethren, there can be no real reform in the family or the State—any more than in the Church—till there be reform in the bosom. But this has not so much as begun, till there is a return to the good old path of God's truth. For let it be concealed as it may by self-flattery, or the flattery of others—yet nothing is more certain than that the sole cause of all our maladies is *our departure from God*. This was ever a grand fact insisted upon by Old Testament Prophets, and they were the wisest, the most earnest, and thorough-going of all reformers.

True, it is an old path to which men are called to turn. Now, with many, that a thing is old is sufficient reason for treating it with contempt, while the novelty of a thing is to them its main recommendation. Worth and worthlessness will not be settled by wise men on any such grounds. We are, perhaps, in our times peculiarly liable to err on this. The present age is remarkable for new inventions, and some of them are, indeed, astonishing. Every new discovery should be hailed with delight, inasmuch as it not only enlarges the field of knowledge, but multiplies the sources of human enjoyment. But religious truth, on which the moral and spiritual well-being of man depends, is not a thing of human invention at all. To this human genius can make no salutary additions. Our religion is of Divine revelation—hence, the perfection of its truths, and their complete adaptation to the condition of man in all ages. Had man invented religion, he might have improved it. He could not do the former: it is at his peril if he attempts the latter. But while religion leaves no room for invention, it, nevertheless, affords abundant scope for mental effort and progress, in the investigation of its doctrines and duties, and in the faithful application of these. He who believes, and sedulously practices, what God has revealed, is making progress in the highest and best sense. In a word, the principles of religion were not

intended to be improved by man—but to improve him. Religion is a work of God, and is perfect. Science may analyze water, from the purest fountain, or the rays of the sun ; but cannot improve either. To attempt to improve what is perfect, is folly ; but to attempt to improve religion by human inventions, is at once folly and impiety.

I have just glanced at a subject, which by two classes of thinkers, extremely remote from each other in many respects, has nevertheless, been made the fruitful source, on the one side, of much superstition ; on the other, of not a little infidelity. There is then no room for mental progress here, as men are bound down to principles, that are old, and unalterable ? Boundless room, my bretheren, but motion is not progress unless it be motion in the right path. A rigorous adherence to God's truth is the right path ; for it leads the soul to Himself, to holiness, to happiness. The path of sin leads the soul away from God, and in the end conducts it to eternal death. Hence, when men are called on to return to the old path, this is not to retrograde but to advance. It is in the language of Scripture, to begin to live—"to walk with God"—to go Heavenward.

Nor can this old path ever become unsafe for the traveler. For although it is of the nature of every human institution, after it has yielded the amount of influence it possessed, to decay, not so with this. Corrupt systems of religion are liable to decay. The particles of truth which they may have contained, once exhausted, the systems themselves must perish. But Christianity, as God has given it, can never by being old become inefficient. The reason of this is, that it is all truth, and that that truth is of universal application to man. When religion therefore has lost its divine energy in the church, or which, is the same thing, manifests little influence on the souls of professors,—it is not because religious truth has lost its intrinsic force, but men have lost their hold on it. Their faith has decayed, not *the principles of faith*. Now the remedy for

this evil is not to set to work to invent new doctrines, or any new ecclesiastical polity; but simply, and with the whole soul, to return to the good old paths of God's truth. This by the aid of the Spirit—and the Spirit will bless no means but his own—is the only way by which the church can regain her lost strength, and marred beauty. My brethren it is even so. Would you have light that your darkness may be dispelled?—turn to the Son of Righteousness. Would ye have warmth for the heart grown cold? turn to that altar with its live coals. Would ye know what God would have you to be, and to do?—turn to that ark of the covenant and to the lively oracles. Would you have peace and hope?—turn to Calvary—look to a crucified Saviour—would you be prepared for the conflict of life, and be fitted for the hour of death? turn to that armoury in which you will find “the sword of the Spirit, the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation.” The remedy—the sole remedy for darkness of mind, coldness of heart, deadness of conscience, is a return by a living faith to the good old path of God's precious truth.

Having thus explained the general sense of the text, I now proceed,—

II. To illustrate certain doctrines, which naturally flow from the principle that has been established.

First,—*That for the salvation of sinners, the old doctrine of justification by the righteousness of Christ, must be adhered to, and if it has been in any way abandoned, there must be a return to it, else there can be no safety for the soul.*

Persons who are disbelievers in certain doctrines of religion must necessarily be indifferent on the whole matter. If man has no soul—if there be nothing of him that is to live eternally, there can be no sense of accountability to God, no right apprehension of guilt, no fear of hell, no desire of heaven. To such a man religion at best is but a useful element in government;—at worst a pestilent superstition, a cunningly devised fable. A cold indiffer-

ence is the natural, and, perhaps, the least offensive form that a sceptical mind assumes. But, to all earnest men, who believe they have souls—who believe they are accountable for moral actions—dread guilt, fear hell, desire the friendship of God:—religion is seen to be an affair of the last moment, and to them it presents itself *under one* of two aspects, *on either of which*, accordingly as their minds fasten, they attempt to obtain guidance and comfort. All men, earnest in this matter, hold in common that they are under government to God,—admit that they have disobeyed Him, are exposed to His wrath, that it is, above all things desirable to escape His wrath, and to obtain the Divine friendship. They all see their need of, and to some extent all desire, salvation. But as to *the way of salvation*, their views differ widely on certain very essential points. Yes, say many, the Divine friendship has been lost, and the wrath of God incurred by sin; yet man, nevertheless, can do, in whole or in part, what will satisfy a merciful God, and thus obtain salvation. It must be confessed, that the views held by not a few, of *God's mercy* and *human merit*, amount to little more than a metaphysical speculation, by which they very effectually stifle conscience, and occasionally perplex an opponent. These men are but poorly in earnest. But not so with all, on the same side,—the doctrines admitted take such a hold of their minds, that *they work as well as speculate*, and if their works cannot, in the evangelical sense, be called good, they are at least numerous, and some of them very trying. Hence the painful rites of a spurious Christianity, and the terrible sacrifices of an earnest Paganism. For it is a mistaken notion to suppose, that to seek salvation by the works of the law, is peculiar to guilty consciences, merely within the pale of revealed religion. Yet every system by which human merit is either in whole or in part made the ground of pardon and acceptance with God, is to seek salvation by the works of the law, and

this is plainly condemned or rather declared to be impossible, in the Revelation, which Divine wisdom has made on the matter. The Bible teaches man to seek for his safety and happiness, *far otherwise*, than in what would disparage the holiness of God, or lower the claims of His justice. But every scheme, by which fallen man is supposed to merit salvation, really does this. To merit salvation is indeed a religion congenial to the pride of our nature, but altogether unsuitable to our present condition. By flattering self-sufficiency, it but deepens guilt, hardens the heart, and brings no healing to the soul, or real peace to the conscience. It knows not God, as at an infinite distance above his creatures; but vainly attempts to bring men to something like an equality with the Lawgiver, and to make the Creator, *in a sense, a debtor to the creature*. The covenant of works, as God gave it, and as man would modify it, are two very different things. As God gave it, and as perfectly suited to the primitive condition of man, it has all the grandeur of justice and truth, and the simplicity of first principles. It is, do this—do all that God requires, and thou shalt live,—but fail in one jot of the law, and thou shalt perish. This is plain, it is just, but to depraved and guilty man it is altogether terrible. It is a flaming Sinai, to which no fallen child of Adam can approach and live. But this scheme of salvation by merit, *as man modifies it*, is as various as his knowledge, his moral tastes, or his fancy. In the common view, I may say in every view taken on the matter by men, who would be justified by the deeds of the law—a holy and a just God is but imperfectly seen in their theory; while man's guilt and depravity are not taken into anything like full account. Hence the erroneous inference, that by the works of the law *man can be saved*. Many indeed are the complexions which this system, with its ineradicable particles of truth, and large portions of error, takes; but in all its forms, from the fanaticism of the Hindoo, by which death

is sought under the chariot wheels of his god, to the prim pharisaism which says its prayers at the corners of the streets, it is but the religion of terror, pride, and selfishness. How can it be otherwise? It is the vain attempt of man to meet God without a Mediator, and to obtain pardon without an all-satisfying atonement; *or at the least*, to come with a righteousness which shall make a Divine Mediator little necessary, and his atonement scarcely more than supplementary. Hence, the adherents of this system, when they look earnestly at God's justice, are filled with hopeless despondency; on the other hand, when they have what they call a clear view of His mercy, their gratulation has in it nothing of humility, and but little of that love and thankfulness, which a profound sense of *unmerited mercy* can alone inspire. This is an old way; but not the good old way.

It is time, however, to inquire what is the Bible view of man, and religion adapted to man. As to man, the Bible lays down the truth, which it every where proves, and illustrates, that he is not only under guilt, but of himself is impotent to remove it. He can make no satisfaction that shall meet the ends of justice, and yet very plainly justice requires perfect satisfaction. For God has added a penalty to his law. He had the unquestionable right to do so, and who will question his right to enforce this, if the law be violated. That penalty is death. Death, my brethren!—yes, but that implies much more than temporal sufferings, or the separation of soul and body. It implies separation from God, from holiness, from all happiness. Yet the soul is not to be annihilated, and to a creature of intellect, passions, moral wants and capacities, and destined to live forever, that death must be unspeakably awful. He that shall endure all this, *shall suffer the loss* of all that is great, good and lovely, and, in addition, shall in various, other ways, through every sense, and faculty, have to suffer great torments. In a word, man's guilt is his liability to punish-

ment, and that punishment to him shall be eternal. The reasons for this? My friends, many reasons might be given, but is not this one enough, and comprehensive of all others worth much? that the *Divine Lawgiver has said*, that creatures violating his law shall be punished, and that this shall bring on them, "everlasting destruction from his presence, and the glory of his power"—has declared, that when they shall go away from his judgment seat unpardoned, to meet the penalty, "they shall go away into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." That is the curse, *and till that curse in some way be exhausted*, there can be no acquittal. But man can in no way exhaust it. How can he? He is ever sinning, hence the terrible thought, that he must for ever lie under the curse.

But man is not only judicially but morally lost. Without holiness no man can see God—man wants holiness; he is not only a criminal at the bar, but morally unlike his judge—yea, hates a God of holiness, "for the carnal mind is enmity against God, is not subject to his law, neither indeed can be." If all this were not denied, or very feebly admitted, man would never dream of acquittal, or acceptance with God in any way by his own merits. But to deny a truth is not to refute it, any more than to escape its consequences. To own, what has been stated, may humble; but it is the way to be saved. The penitent with his hand on his mouth, and his mouth in the dust, crying out "unclean! unclean!"—crying out "God be merciful to me a sinner," is surely in the right way.

But revealed religion is not a mere announcement of man's guilt, depravity and helplessness. If there be a Sinai in it, dark and trembling with the presence of the Eternal judge, there is also, blessed be God, a Calvary in it:—trembling too, but trembling in the presence of the agonies of the Divine Saviour, dealing with man's case, that for him there may be mercy, *and yet justice be held sacred*. The announcement of a Saviour, suitable to the

wants of a sinner, is what makes Christianity a Gospel to man. Oh! that was a day much to be remembered! Darkness was over much, as well as over the land; but then hope *was preparing*, to step forth from behind that darkness and proclaim in the midst of great light, that the law was magnified, justice satisfied, and man saved. This was the mystery of Godliness—Emanuel identifying himself with us—taking up our lost condition—*exhausting the curse*, and so making justice and mercy meet together. He abolished death by taking that death upon Himself. He could do this, no one else could. And by what He did, and suffered, He put matters to rights. Hence, he is, “the Lord over righteousness”—hence all who believe in him may find a justifying righteousness. The substitution was wondrous, the sacrifice was amazing! yet all in the highest degree suitable. For it was the voluntary substitution of Him innocent, for us guilty,—of him in every sense all powerful, for us in every sense all weakness, and all helplessness. He drank the bitter cup to the dregs, then said “It is finished.” Yea, my brethren, and was not that work most gloriously finished, for while mercy was crowned at the cross, justice held the sceptre unshaken on the throne?

Nor did the Saviour merely work out a perfect righteousness for pardon; He also procured for his people all the Divine influences for holiness. He not only obtained for them a title to heaven, but also the means to fit them for it. He is not only “made unto them redemption,” but “also sanctification.” Not unto us, then, not unto us, *but to Him*, be all the glory of our pardon and acceptance with God, and all the glory of our holiness too. But for his atoning blood, there had been no pardon; but for his mighty Spirit, there had been no holiness for man.

Christ is then our hope—and He who was the hope of Israel must still be the hope of all who will be saved. The faith of the redeemed is simply this, that they are ran-

somed by His blood, sanctified by His Spirit, and shall at last be brought by Him to the heavenly inheritance. *This is the faith of the Saints*—this is good news to the sinner. And was it not for substance the Gospel of old? It was indeed the old path in which Abel walked, when he offered his sacrifice in faith. It was that in which Abraham walked when he saw Messiah's day afar off, and was glad. It was the path, in which prophets and apostles walked, who all sought salvation in means by faith, not in merit by works. In this way they found joy and peace. The question is not how much did those ancient Saints, who "all died in the faith" of the promises, understand of the facts of the Saviour's work? There was much in this, which the events could only explain—but did these Worthies firmly believe what they were taught of Him who was to come, as the substitute of his people? The value of a man's faith, is not in the extent of the field of speculative knowledge his eye may wander over, but in the intensity of soul, *by which he fastens on essential points*. Those who walked in this old way found it the way of safety; by it they reached heaven, and are now "the spirits of the just made perfect." It is still the only way that leads to grace, and glory. All other ways lead but from one delusion to another, and at last end in perdition. To the sinner trembling under a load of guilt, and asking what he shall do to be saved—tell him, oh! tell him of the way of salvation—point to this, and say to his troubled conscience, here is the way, walk in it, and thou shalt find grace, and peace, and rest for thy soul.

Be assured of it—for all ecclesiastical history proves it—that during those seasons, when the Church has appeared "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners," she was then walking closely in the good old path of gospel truth. It was *this truth*, vividly seen, and intensely felt, that enabled the first apostles of the cross so triumphantly to overthrow superstition, and will-

worship, and in a little while, to change to a wonderful extent, the whole moral aspect of society. Not in the gift of tongues, or in the gift of working miracles, lay the great strength of these men for their work, but in their firm faith in the way of salvation, and in their ardent love for the glory of their Master. It was this, that made their tongues like flames of fire, that gave them a strength which no toils could exhaust, and a courage which no dangers could appal. We shall have successful missionary enterprises, not when the apostolic gift of miracles is restored, but when men shall go forth to the work with a *large measure* of apostolic faith and piety. And for a moment yet to advert to our former argument. Wherein lay the great strength of our reformers? Plainly in their ardent piety and extraordinary faith in the way of salvation. These men saw the world lying in wickedness, drowned in superstition, and they saw *but one hope* for it—the old way of salvation. Yes, my hearers, this is the pillar of fire in the wilderness. The God of glory, and of mercy, is there. The way of salvation then, held, not as a popular hearsay, but in strong faith, as the best of all heaven's truths to man, and the Church will have life, energy, love and peace. And when it is asked, as it often is, in deep vexation of heart, what shall cure us of our spiritual feebleness, and shameful coldness in religion?—what shall take away our criminal variance, emulations, and strife? To my mind, there is but one answer. We must turn with a more ardent zeal, and with a stronger faith to the good old way of salvation. We must get the whole soul filled, and warmed with right views of Christ—of His person, His work, His benefits to believers. As in this lies the hope of each individual for well-being, and well-doing, so in it lies the sole hope of the Church. The Church that expects to find light and warmth elsewhere, than at the cross, is but deepening her blindness, and increasing the torpor of her spiritual paralysis. But

Secondly,—To walk in the good old path, *implies a thorough practical piety.*

The truth which we have briefly illustrated, is the heavenly seed. Whenever this is received into good and honest hearts, it will bring forth the fruits of piety—"in some an hundred fold, in some sixty, and in some thirty." Where there is not even the thirty fold, the seed has never taken root or has withered away—the precious doctrines of the gospel have perished with the hearing, or gone off in wordy speculation. They have not been received in love, and are not held in faith, if there be no fruit. It is not my intention, however, at present, to insist on those acts of piety which are performed by all who walk in the good old way, but rather to notice a few points *in that temper of mind*, in which every duty should be performed.

Firstly,—Every religious duty *should be made a business of conscience.*

A good conscience is the soul listening with an obedient ear to the voice of the Lord—doing this, or eschewing that, because God wills it to be so. Such a conscience is the product of religion. It is also the instrument by which a man of piety will constantly work. A conscientious man may have a bad religion, and bear bad fruit, for he may have been illy taught;—but a man without a conscience in religion, will abuse the purest truths, and produce nothing from them, but the most fatal results. And it is just all the worse, the more frequently he engages in religious duties. Such a man professes to be waiting on God—he is waiting on self. He professes to be desirous to hear what God will speak; but the desire of his heart is, to hear his fellow man speak him fair, and he says to himself, Peace, peace—"to-morrow shall be as this day," for all goes well. Very deplorable is the state of that man, who engages in religious duties merely to serve some low paltry end. He has more to fear than ordinary formality or hypocrisy. He may well fear, lest he be

given up to utter justicial blindness. Can it be otherwise? He "holds the truth in unrighteousness," and is perhaps of all God's creatures, the most criminally incongruous. *On the other hand*, to him who makes conscience of duty all is simple, consistent, definite. In the duties of the closet, the family, and sanctuary, he takes his part, not for form's sake, or the sake of reputation; but because God has required it of him. He prays, reads, hears and communicates, because God commands him to do so; and has promised an increase of grace, and the comforts of His Spirit to those who obey Him. This is enough to the man of conscience. He waits on God, and finds that he "is not sent empty away." And even if the duty be painful, and for a time appears fruitless, he feels that he dare not give it over. He is a servant, the Divine Master commands it. He is a child, his Heavenly Father requires it. He is a redeemed man, his Saviour enjoins it. Sloth may demur, a worldly expediency may plead, but to the soul listening to the voice of God, there can be but one course—simple obedience, and that obedience entirely on the Divine authority. O, blessed, O, gracious state of mind! For was it not this wrought in them by the holy Spirit, that qualified martyrs and confessors for their trials; and enabled them to manifest that strong and serene moral courage, which adorned their profession and astonished and instructed the world. The soul listening with humility and love, to the allwise God, must become wise and good, diligent in duty, and in many respects *great in duty* as well as in trials, for he who has a heaven enlightened conscience feels constantly surrounded with many sacred and powerful motives to duty. The command comes to him as a child of God, a follower of Jesus, a lover of his brethren. What force must every command laden *with such motives*, have in sweetly constraining the Christian to seek the advancement of the Divine glory, and the good of his fellow-men. Indeed, the language of his heart must be, I dare not leave these

closet or family duties undone, be undone what may. I dare not forsake the assemblies of the Saints, or neglect any means by which I may get good or do good. My gracious Saviour's commands are on me, and he has added promises to his commands. Nor dare I do aught, that would hurt the soul of one man, or mar the peace, or break the unity of the Church. My Saviour forbids all this. He has his eye on me. This, my brethren, is conscience in religion. This is the soul communing with itself,—hearing, fearing, loving and obeying God.

Would that men in matters of religion were ever men of conscience! Pity it is that men carry the word conscience so much on their lips, but feel its power *so little* in their hearts. Let all its lessons be learned from the sacred page, and then let these lessons be deeply pondered. Let the dictates of an enlightened conscience influence you thoroughly in every feeling, and duty in your religion. Would not this end much, and begin much in the Church? It would put an end to all the religion of mere pretence. For, is not hypocritical pretence, but a Satan-devised substitute for conscience? It would end all that thing called fashionable religion, and, in fine, it would end the religion of cold formalism. Till all this ends, nothing good can begin. That there is so much of cant, frivolity, and formality in sacred duties, among professing Christians, is proof positive that many stand specially in need of severe lessons from an enlightened conscience. And surely it is not easy to conceive of anything more offensive to the eye of a holy God, than a worship offered, at his footstool, without conscience. God will have sincerity in his worshippers. But there is in this a total want of sincerity. Alas! is not this, of all wants, the most fatal! Such a worshipper is "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal." It is not what men will say of you, if you do this thing, or avoid that in religion? Man's approbation, or censure, is at best, a small affair in this matter; it may be less than nothing—but the solemn

inquiry is, What has God commanded? What will God say to you, if the thing be done, and what will he say, if you do the contrary? Will he approve, or will he condemn? My brethren, that is the point for you to settle. But that is just conscience in religion. To the right exercise of this, you must come, if you would be found walking in the good old way. But if you feel that it hath not been thus with you, *but far otherwise* in your religious duties, then I beseech you, turn to that good way of making conscience of every religious duty. Make conscience of it in all the forms in which it can be looked at—in all the ways in which you go about it. If not so, then I must tell you, that your religious duties, be they ever so punctiliously, or decorously performed, do but dishonour God, injure your soul, and in various ways do mischief to others. Nor must it be the mere conscience of party or public opinion that you are to go by. This can never be a substitute *for individual conscience*. Indeed, party very often has no conscience, but only a loud voice—and woe to the man who takes that voice for guidance, instead of the wisdom of God. If each for himself shall have to answer at the judgment day, then each for himself should have a conscience—should listen with a “*circumcised ear*” to what God the Lord doth speak, and constantly, and faithfully, do what he thinks God commands.

2.—*Those who walk in the good old way will worship God in love.*

Man, as he came from the hand of his God, and as he then stood related to Him, was in every sense, a noble and a happy creature. He bore the Divine image, “*in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness.*” To him God could speak, not as to the inferior creatures, *by the laws of physical instincts*; but in the language of *articulated wisdom and love*. And man could answer his God—and by an intelligent, voluntary and loving obedience own Him as his Creator, and Lawgiver. Wonderful commu-

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nion this betwixt the uncreated mind and the mind of a creature. This was the first order of things, betwixt God and man,—and in it lay the chief glory of man, as out of it would have flown for him a full and lasting happiness. "But man being in honour, abode not." His sin destroyed this order of things, and introduced the fatalest disorder. For, that man is now unfit, yea averse to hold communion with God, is really the cause of all the other disorder and misery, into which he has fallen. The Son of God came as a *Restorer*. Hence, the believer in Jesus, is not only ransomed, but in many senses *restored to order*. For is not salvation the recovery of harmony betwixt God and man? Christ, is our Daysman, and hath made *the peace*. And that spirit, who at first, brought order out of confusion, brings order into the bosom of those he regenerates, by making them fit to love God, and under the influence of that love to seek communion with Him. If this love be not felt, that communion cannot be sought. But is not communion with God, the chief thing the christian has in view in every religious duty? It is love that leads the soul to seek it, and prepares the soul for the enjoyment of it. No two men are more unlike, than he, who enters the sanctuary longing for communion with God—and he who comes there as the other, but neither desires nor hopes for this. These persons may differ in many respects, but the grand difference is this, that the former has love to God, the latter wants it. He who is without love to God, may outwardly worship as the other, giving no sign of dissatisfaction; yet he cannot conceal from himself, that in the duty he has no enjoyment, and reaps from it no spiritual advantages; while he who loves his God and Saviour finds every duty a *privilege* as it affords him the means of the highest and most precious communion. In many things, the want of love, is the want of a power, which other, and valuable qualities can but imperfectly supply; but in religious duties *the want of*

love has the effect of *neutralizing all the other powers* and of turning the most sacred duty into a wearisome, if not a profane ceremony.

It needs scarcely to be remarked, that love to God in Christ, *in the bosom of a believer*, is an emotion far too complex to be comprehended in any simple definition. Indeed, human language is but a poor exponent of such emotions.

A delight in the excellencies of God—a desire to be like him, and to be loved by him, assuredly implies not a little of what is meant by this love. And ought not this to be felt by all, who would hold communion with God, in sacred duties? That God should be loved, seems one of the plainest of all aphorisms. Yes—and it has to the christian an emphasis, which can be but imperfectly felt by those, who merely see his wisdom and goodness in the beauties of nature, or only partake of the fruits of his goodness, in the bounties of a common providence, rich and varied as these are. God in Christ, is the God of the christian; on Him the believer can look and not die. For this *manifestation* of God as he is—of what he has done—is doing, and has promised to do for poor sinners, not only superadds infinitely to the evidence, which we have in nature for loving him, but furnishes an entirely new, and far more powerful kind of evidence, why we should love him, “with the whole heart, soul, strength and mind.” The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord, and men are plainly without excuse if they do not love him. Yet the *riches of God’s love* to man, are in Christ, and what Christ is to us. It will not be expected, that I should enter at length into this delightful theme. Suffice it to say, that christianity, not only unfolds to our view, with amazing beauty and force, the perfect holiness of God, as well fitted to awaken love in pure minds;—but it also presents that holy Being in infinite wisdom, and with marvellous condescension, bestowing the choicest blessings on the

undeserving. Christianity reveals God pardoning the guilty—arraying the degraded in everlasting honour, and communicating to the wretched “fulness of joy, and pleasure for ever more at his own right hand:”—and for the accomplishment of this, the WORD made flesh, Emanuel dying on the cross. Oh! my hearer, dost thou really believe it? for it is this that will awaken thy love.—Dost thou believe, that but for what a God of mercy hath done, thou hadst been a lost soul through eternity,—but, because of what hath in mercy been done, thou shalt not be lost?—Thou hast the friendship of God now, thou shalt for ever be a holy and a happy creature in the heaven of heavens. Dost thou believe this, and not love Him who first loved thee, and gave himself for thee, that He might redeem thy soul from death, and ransom thee from destruction? Looking at the blessed Jesus, is not this the language of thy heart? “Lord, thou knowest that I love thee,”—feebly, alas! but yet, Lord, I do love thee.

Well, then, you who can say so, may engage in duty with the hope of honouring God in it, and of having enjoyment and profit from it. It was thus that ancient saints who walked *in the good old way*, loved God, and longed to meet with Him. “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh cryeth out for the living God!” And what else but this love caused *their hearts* “to burn within them, while he talked with them by the way, and opened to them the Scriptures?” Yea, and it was this love that made them exceeding glad,” as they believed not for joy, and wondered,”—seeing the Lord. It was this, too, that brought a weeping Mary to the sepulchre, “early on the first day of the week,” vainly “seeking the living among the dead,” yet with ardent love seeking the Lord. And, my Brethren, why should not *the same love* make you also long for the courts of His house, and make your heart burn within you, while He talks

"with you by the way?" This love, *if felt as it ought*, will cause you to seek Him with sorrow when you cannot find Him, and will cause you to be exceedingly glad, when you do find Him, *in the closet, at the Communion table*, or in any other ordinance. To his people, Chirst is, "indeed, the chiefest among ten thousand," and they will seek Him, "whom their soul loveth."

Around the blind, every sort of beauty may be scattered in profusion, but it affects them not, for they do not see it; and to many, *even He who is altogether lovely*, "has no beauty that they should desire Him." It is now, as it was of old, "the world knoweth not God." Fallen man is smitten with blindness of mind, and a far worse blindness of heart to the Divine excellencies. Wonder not that such feel no interest in the duties of religion. Indeed, the interest which they sometimes manifest is of so questionable a sort, that it alarms one even more than their ordinary indifference. But what of the coldness of Christians? On this much might be said in the shape of argument, and in the tone of warning and reproof. And yet, methinks, a minister needs to be cautious in employing bitter censure against the dulness and coldness of his hearers. I dare not, for my part, say much in this strain, lest some pious soul, afflicted with the evil, might whisper "thou art the man!" My brethren, I know it: the Pulpit may, in divers ways, throw a freezing influence over the Pews. Yet let me remind you of what you should know, that there may also arise from the Pews a chilling influence, which shall sorely affect the Pulpit. But be this evil in whichever quarter it may, I know of no cure for it, but an increase of love to God, our Saviour. Then shall there be more power in the preacher, and more comfort and edification in the hearers. But,

3. *Those who walk in the good old way will worship God in reverence.*

Man must know God, or all his other knowledge is

valueless for the great end of his being, and may prove in many ways pernicious. To what extent the knowledge of God is accurately held, may with tolerable certainty be inferred, from *the forms* of worship, but especially from *the temper of mind*, in which a man engages in these. The childish follies, horrid cruelties, and obscene rites of Paganism, are simply the embodiments of the notions the heathen entertain of their gods. Whatever else contributed to the growth of superstitious observances, in the Christian Church, there can be no doubt, that *the decay of correct notions of God* was the main cause. The Reformation was the recovery of much, but of nothing more valuable to man than the correct view of God which was restored to the Church. For it is of the nature of this highest branch of knowledge, that when held in purity, it purifies all other kinds of knowledge, and *turns them all into wisdom*. Indeed, without this knowledge all religion must be essentially and necessarily wrong. Hence, all false religions are characterised either by puerile levities or appalling terrors; but never by reverence or an enlightened adoration. Where God is known aright He will be worshipped not with the mere fear which omnipotent wrath awakens, but with the love and reverence which a just view of all His perfections inspires.

Whatever may be the difference of form, the spirit of worship should be the same among God's children on earth, as it is among the higher orders in heaven. Now we know that angels, and the spirits of the just made perfect, worship God with the profoundest awe and reverence. *They veil their faces with their wings in His presence. They cast down their crowns before Him. They cry out, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts.* This is the temper of mind in which these beings of excellent nature and vast knowledge worship Him. But the same holy, holy God, is the Being that you worship. Is it with an awe and reverence at all similar to theirs who surround His throne?

Do they revere Him much, because they know much of Him? Man's knowledge, it is true, is more limited, for he dwells not as they do, amidst the unclouded splendours of heavenly truth, yet he is not enveloped in darkness. If God "keeps back the face of His throne" from man—shows him but "a small part of His ways,"—still, much of "the invisible things of God are clearly seen by the things which are made" and *the things He has done in His providence and grace*. Hence, every Christian has abundant means for knowing that the God whom he worships "inhabith eternity,"—is Omnipotent, Omniscient,—the Creator and Ruler of the universe, and is perfectly holy, just and good. All this, unquestionably, is more fully understood by angels in heaven than by man on the earth; still, every instructed Christian has the means of knowing enough of God's perfections and government to awaken great reverence in him when he draws near in acts of worship to that glorious Being.

And wherewithal shall we, who are but sinful dust and ashes, come before Him, or how shall we order our speech aright in His presence? To this momentous question there is but one answer: "We have an Advocate with the Father,"—Jesus "is the way to the Father." But, then, mark it—although in approaching God through a Mediator "the fear that causeth torment is cast out," yet the reverence for Him is not on this account lessened, but rather vastly increased. If the soul never can see the Divine amiability in a light so inviting, as when by faith it sees God in Christ "*reconciled and reconciling sinners to Himself*"; so is it just when this view is taken, that His holiness, wisdom, truth, justice and goodness appear in surpassing grandeur. He who finds his reverence decaying as he becomes familiar with a sin-pardoning God, has reason to fear *that somewhat* in the first principles of his faith is essentially wrong. For when all the principles of faith are sound, and *this grace itself* in lively exercise, the

stronger it becomes the more profound will our reverence be. The believer sees enough to awaken the love of complacency, but not simply that,—*adoring love* is properly the mood of his most sacred emotions.

It was thus that holy men of old felt as they worshipped. The Book of Psalms—the Prophets—the Epistles—are all full of evidence of a pure and fervent veneration. Nor is it unworthy of notice, that the most favoured of these saints, such as Isaiah and John, were the most humbled and awed when they had special manifestations of the Divine Glory. He who has no faith, can have no veneration. He whose faith is weak will adore feebly. But with the Christian, whose soul is in high spiritual health, it is not thus. He feels that worship *must be adoration*, or it is nothing, or worse than nothing. He knows that he is to worship “with reverence and godly fear,” and this reverence influences his whole spiritual life, the *inner* even more than the outer. For while he loves, he adores—while he trusts, he reveres; and while with high joy he says Abba Father, he lies in lowest humility at the footstool. And what but this high adoration, this reverence for Jehovah, so humbling, yet so elevating, has given to *simple forms of family piety*, and sanctuary services, a dignity, a meaning, and a purifying influence, which the scenic and gorgeous displays of a superstitious ritual can but poorly imitate:—Gorgeous displays of superstition, employed ostensibly to aid adoration, but much more truly to *hide the painful and conscious want of it*.

Yet let me not be mistaken, the reverence in religious duties for which I plead, does not by any means consist in the “disfiguring of the countenance,” in a solemn and affected tone of voice, the upturned gaze, or the wild glance of the eye. A very little of this, is a little too much. The church cannot too soon get quit of it, if she would retain simplicity and sincerity. This is the reverence that we desiderate:—*The soul enlightened, and all*

alive to a present God in duty—seeing by faith the Almighty, the holy, just, and merciful God as near to search the heart, to answer, to bless. To feel that thou art on the mount with God, and as if with God alone—seeing Him to be all glorious, yet condescending; and seeing thyself to be mean and vile, yet graciously admitted to a near and precious communion with Him. This is the adoration of the soul—this is the reverence, or, if you will, *the cause* of the reverence, which should be felt by all who worship God.

My hearers, think ye, that this is a very prevailing characteristic of professing Christians in our times? We may be favorably distinguished for some things in which our forefathers were deficient, but I fear that reverence for *the holy* is not among these. I may be wrong, yet I cannot but express my apprehension, that in simple and ardent reverence, the present age will not compare favorably with periods to which it were easy to refer. When religion, in our day, appears with somewhat of earnestness, it is so apt to go to *the house tops*, and stun all ears with feverish excitement and the glories of partizan triumph, that one feels sadly the want of that ancient reverence, which, while it warmed and strengthened, awed and humbled! “The Lord was not in the wind; the Lord was not in the earthquake; the Lord was not in the fire; but in the still small voice,” and when the Prophet heard it, he “wrapt his face in his mantle.” My brethren, when we are drawing near to God, and when *he is speaking* to us, should there not be a wrapping of the face, as it were, in the mantle? I mean that there should be awe, reverence and a loving adoration. To think that the word of God should be on our lips, or sounding in our ears, or the symbols of his love in our hands, yet no reverence for him in our hearts, is sad. Brethren, it ought not so to be.

But I now come to the last topic in the discourse, and on this I must be extremely brief.

Those who walk in the good old way, will strive to have a pure and consistent morality.

By this I just understand the keeping of the second table of the law. Love to God is the sum of the first table—love to our fellow-creatures is the sum of the second. It is pleasing to observe that all men, whose opinion is worth much, are settling down more and more in the conviction, that morality can only be really effective, when it has its roots deeply struck into religion, and is drawing all its nourishment thence. Even men of the world, *in their own way*, go far to admit this. Christians never had, and never could have, a doubt on it. For how is it possible, that he who disowns the authority of God, and feels no love to Him, can either be just or merciful to his fellow-men? Atheism can furnish neither the *principles* nor the *motives* to this. Selfishness reigning in the heart, and a man's principles are those of a narrow expediency, and his motives merely the impulse of the prevailing passion, and the voice of public opinion. Morality, without religious truth as its basis, and no motives of piety as its support, has, under every variety of circumstances, been repeatedly tried, and has, in every instance, entirely failed. God has given to man a perfect system of morality, both as to principles and motives, and this has not failed, and never can.

Those who *walk in the good old way*, must walk strictly according to this. The Christian is no more at liberty to trifle with the claims of the second table, than with those of the first. He dares not say "he loves God, who hates his brother." But that man hates his brother who is false, or unjust, as well as cruel. Is it asked what, in that case, is to be said of certain high-flown religionists? Plainly this is to be said—that if they are false men, malicious, impure, or selfish, their religion is vain, and all the more vain for high pretensions. It is not a set of orthodox phrases, glibly or sanctimoniously uttered, that evidences a man's Christianity to be sound at heart; but *an humble piety* and a

consistent and well-developed *Bible morality*. If Christ be any thing to you, He is your Saviour-King as well as your Saviour-Priest. To talk of believing in him, and yet live in wilful violation of His authority, is a palpable contradiction, which you must get quit of, or stand charged with a miserable formalism, or a ruinous hypocrisy.

Nor do we fear gravely to affirm, that wherever the principles of the Gospel are held in faith, and where its true piety is fully carried out, there will be found among that people *a purity and strength* of moral sentiment, and a broad and sincere application of *moral practice* in every day life, which will be sought for in vain where religion is spurious, or where its heavenly doctrines are unknown. Not to see this is to be blind to the plainest of all facts. To see it, and yet deny it, shows a weak and bitter prejudice against the truth. For I hold it to be axiomatically plain, that when the Gospel of Christ has taken a firm hold of the understanding, the conscience and heart of a man, that man, although he may not be perfect, yet will in a high sense be rigorously moral. You, who are professors of religion, readily admit this. Well, how does it apply when each brings it home to himself? Dost thou adorn thy profession, my hearer, with truthfulness, temperance, purity, honesty and benevolence? Or is it far otherwise? Does conscience accuse thee of a lax morality? Then, I beseech thee to consider thy inconsistent and dangerous position—inconsistent it is, with the profession thou hast made of submission to Christ's laws;—dangerous it is, for if the context be looked at, it will be seen that the judgments threatened against the Jews were mainly for breaches of the second table of the law. Ponder this ye who have departed from the path by any duty neglected, by any wilful sin committed, and instantly return to *the good old way*. Live in purity, love justice, do mercy. In a word, "love thy neighbour as thyself."

I need scarcely remark to those who are accustomed to

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hear me, that partly from the nature of the text, as well as from a wish to make the discourse suitable to the present occasion, I have to-day departed very far from my usual method of handling a subject. Instead of confining myself to a somewhat close investigation of a particular topic, I have been led to take up many, and to dismiss each with but a brief illustration. And now, from a want of time, I cannot do more than offer a few slight observations on one of these great moral principles—truthfulness.

Satan is the father of lies—the author of falsehood. A false man is the child of the devil. Nor is there anything, if perhaps, we except malice, which more clearly evidences this terrible and near relationship to the prince of darkness, than *an utter disregard to truth*. Than falsehood, no vice can be more directly opposed to the Divine nature, and the established harmony of the universe. Hence the false man is not only a child of the *Adversary*, but becomes himself a parent of confusion, and an adversary to everything that is good. The God of order, who is the God of truth, will not tolerate this. He has very plainly pronounced the doom of the liar. But God requires far more of his children, than that they *do not utter* falsehood. They are to be true in the inward parts. First of all, true *in themselves*, and *to themselves*. They are to be true to their feelings to the gentle as well as the severe emotions: so that the symbols of thought and emotion shall fairly tell what they ought, and what they are supposed to tell. This were a grand thing to see, and innumerable great and good things would flow from it.

Courage in any sense is a thing of some value; but that moral courage, which braces up a man, under all circumstances to speak the truth promptly, the moment that duty calls—and that, not only fully and fearlessly by his words, but by his very look and tone—is a thing of infinite value. He who has this courage will be afraid of nothing so much as a falsehood, *even by his very silence*. And upon the

whole, is not he the most dangerous of all cowards, and the most meanly selfish of men, who never speaks the thing as it is, *because it is*, but speaks as he fancies it will please or soothe others, or save himself some uneasiness, or bring him some paltry gain? Depend on it, whenever moral courage is low—when there is a want of that honest manliness, which cannot say yes or no, *as it should be*, let the yes or the no tell as it may, the fear and the love of God is low in that soul. And I entreat you to beware of being drawn into the path of falsity by these plausible but dangerous excuses—a *becoming caution*—the *interests of our party*—*amiable complaisance*—and the like. The Bible fact is, that the path of falsity leads to hell. There can be no good excuse for taking such a road. Be sternly truthful; for is it not an established fact, that the man who is sternly true is the man who, in the end, is found to have been wisely tender? Wickedness and folly may compel him to utter what is disagreeably severe; but what help? unless wickedness and folly are to be kindly smoothed down until ruin seizes its victim? This is often done. The world, indeed, is full of such kindness: just because overrun with falsehood. Clearly the man of truth is the man of wisdom and kindness. His *smitings* are those of a friend—often most painful to himself, but always salutary to the erring, if they have the sense and grace to listen, and not the infatuation to repel disagreeable truth, when prudently and honestly spoken. Whereas the false man, with his blandness, is doing mischief in many ways; and in the end, will be found to have done nothing but mischief. God is true—Christ is the truth—Heaven is a world of truth. Would you walk with God? would you honor your Saviour? would you be dwellers in heaven? then walk now in *the good old way* of truthfulness.

A word now in conclusion:—The house which has been opened this day as a place of public worship, does credit to your taste and munificence, as a congregation. You will

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however, remember that it is the Gospel in its purity and fulness that can make any place of worship either an object of present interest, or of future hope. *This is the true glory of the house.* I would fain believe that the force of this is in some measure felt by you. And furthermore that it is the ardent wish of your hearts that not only in your time, but for generations to come, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus may be proclaimed within these walls. God grant it may be so! And may He grant, that while from this pulpit the Gospel shall be preached *just as the Spirit of the Lord hath revealed it*, the men and the women, who shall in days to come, sit in these seats, shall listen with believing and joyous acceptance to that Gospel of free pardon and perfect peace. But if the time should ever come, when in this house "another gospel" shall be enunciated, and shall be listened to with approbation, while the Gospel of Salvation through a crucified Saviour, is forgotten or disrelished,—then let the solemn inscription which is on the slab in the front of the church be erased, and let Ichabod be engraven there.